

**IUCN – SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN THE MEDITERRANEAN
PANORAMA AND PERSPECTIVES, STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS
WORKING DOCUMENT – DRAFT TEXT
SUMMARISED VERSION**

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1 – THE DOCUMENT AND ITS PURPOSE.

The purpose of this document is to address the following issues very concisely:

- A global panorama of the current relationship between the sustainability of tourism and the geographical space of the Mediterranean,
- The fields in which action must be taken in order to progress towards sustainability,
- Some suggestions for general and specific lines of work or proposals for action.

The document considers tourism to be very different from public use and organised leisure, but these are phenomena which are very difficult to separate in the more highly developed and concentrated Mediterranean tourist resorts.

NOTE: in parallel to this document, a list of basic references has been drawn up containing the main aspects addressed and which could serve as an inspiration and a documentary basis for further work in this field and for future projects.

2 – INTRODUCTION AND JUSTIFICATION.

There is no doubt that there is generalised concern about the possibilities and limits of tourism in such an emblematic, sensitive space as the Mediterranean, and that the implementation of wide-ranging strategies for sustainable tourism in this area, from a global point of view, faces, a priori, a large number of difficulties.

3 - Marketing of tourist destinations and sustainability.

In this document, we make many references to the marketing of tourism and of destinations, as it has a significant relationship with the synergies and frictions affecting sustainable development policies and their potential application.

From the point of view of tourist marketing, the Mediterranean area as a whole is a large, unique destination which is a beacon for international tourism. For this reason, any action taken in the area will very probably influence trends in international tourist markets, both outgoing and incoming, especially in the less developed, emerging markets.

In the field of marketing, there is no doubt that the role of the Chambers of Commerce of the Mediterranean will be crucial, as a means of channelling knowledge and initiatives and as a think-tank for sustainability strategies that will lead to a bright future for this great tourist destination.

The appearance of new technologies in the field of tourist marketing makes it essential for companies, professionals and mediating organisations to keep their skill levels high and permanently updated.

4 – The requirements of sustainability.

The requirements of sustainability, which must be present in any action aimed at the development of sustainable tourism, must pay special, coordinated attention to the following:

- The environment/landscape,
- socio-cultural issues
- economic-entrepreneurial matters.

This is especially so in developing territories and destinations, so as to guarantee the future of the territory and the stability of business initiatives. We shall examine later the conceptual framework of each of these fields or requirements for sustainability.

We shall now consider a brief conceptual framework for sustainable tourism which will allow us to move forward using the same basic language.

5 – Initial notes for a conceptual framework of sustainable tourism.

In accordance with the usual definitions generally-accepted by academics and international organisations, sustainable tourism cares for the environment because it is an ethical duty, because it is economically intelligent and for market reasons.

The recommendations for the sustainable development of tourism and sustainable management practices are applicable to all types of tourism in all destinations, including mass tourism and the different, more specialised tourist segments. The principles of sustainability refer to the environmental/landscape, economic/entrepreneurial and socio-cultural aspects of tourist development, to which we have already referred. An appropriate balance must be found between these three dimensions in order to guarantee long-term sustainability.

6 – “Monocrop tourism” and environmental sustainability.

The issue of environmental sustainability is also closely related to tourist “monocropping”. There is an inevitable tendency in any local community progressively to replace traditional productive activities with tourism as soon as it becomes apparent that tourism is significantly more profitable than traditional industries, mainly agriculture and forestry. When this occurs, other activities and farms are frequently abandoned and they eventually deteriorate or are lost.

7 – The concept of responsible tourism.

The concept of responsible tourism delves deeper into the active role of tourists and tourism companies in the achievement of the objectives of sustainability. It lays down frameworks for planning and, above all, codes of conduct regarding both the environment and the local community and its culture. Responsible tourism should not be confused with solidarity tourism, which also adds the factor of the active participation of the tourist in environmental or social solidarity or voluntary work.

8 – Social sustainability.

Social sustainability refers to the conservation of social structures in local communities involved in sustainable tourism. There is a very close relationship between social sustainability and cultural sustainability; in fact, we sometimes use the more general term “socio-cultural sustainability”.

9 – Cultural sustainability.

Cultural sustainability is of great importance within the framework of sustainable tourism. We believe that it is impossible to contemplate the sustainable development of tourist destinations and local communities without showing maximum respect for and promotion of their cultural values and heritage. It has already become clear that combining this with tourist development, even on a small scale, will not be easy.

10 – Economic-entrepreneurial sustainability.

Although sustainable tourism involves an important element of conservation of the natural heritage and of local communities, it is also obvious that it must guarantee the economic prosperity of those very communities and of the businesspersons and professionals who embark on tourist activities.

Therefore, an essential part of planning is to provide all possible means for the local or autochthonous population of the area or country involved to be the central actors in most of the activities in the area in question. This is a basic conceptual element of development cooperation in the field of sustainable tourism.

Again, the role of the Chambers of Commerce and of business associations in the promotion of sustainable tourism enterprise is a key to the achievement of this objective.

11 – Positive and negative impacts of tourism.

A lot has already been written about the positive and negative impacts of tourism and, today, in consolidated Mediterranean tourist destinations, there is great concern among the institutions and some social agents over possible means of preventing the degradation of the environment and of the landscape, degradation that in previous decades was accepted as being inherent to tourism and was seen as an unavoidable, lesser evil.

12 – Tourism, leisure and public use.

The concepts of leisure in contact with nature, of cultural leisure and leisure in rural areas are closely related to the demand for tourist products of this type, and they share public use facilities, spaces and legislation. In fact, the concept of public use is often confused with tourism by those responsible for the management of the spaces, as if the mere fact that there are public facilities were sufficient to ensure the provision of high-quality tourist services. This is clearly not the case in some of the more specialised types of nature tourism.

The concept of public use is more closely related to the management of protected natural spaces and other natural spaces adapted for use by the public, but in the main tourist countries, it is inevitable that such spaces are heavily involved in tourism.

13 – Compatibility of models of tourist development.

It is particularly true that invasive models of tourism which distort local culture close the doors to those tourists who are more interested in that culture and in the landscape and resources which most closely represent the reality of the land, independently of the environmental and aesthetic impacts that they cause. Planning involves the definition of the type of tourism suitable for each territory and destination, and all of those territories and destinations are not suitable for all of the different types of tourism. The tendency towards specialisation and clusters is a logical consequence of the dynamics of development seen over the last few decades.

14 – The pressure of demand.

It is, in all events, necessary to plan systems to cope with the logistics and the attention required by large numbers of tourists since the enormous pressure of visitors, residential tourists and general tourists on the more accessible and emblematic spaces of the Mediterranean coastline and hinterland cannot be avoided in either the short or the medium-term.

How to reconcile sustainability with the desire to travel and the right of large numbers of the general population to enjoy tourism is a very complex question, as marketing and social trends sell tourism as a fundamental right.

15 – The complexity of sustainable tourism.

Sustainable tourism strategies must, therefore, address a large number of basic issues which it is almost impossible to list comprehensively since new tourist products and trends are continually appearing, bringing in new variables to the design of sustainability policies.

16 – The role of business in sustainable tourism.

The existence of made-to-measure sustainability tools and the cooperation of small enterprises are essential in order for sustainability policies and strategies to be applied in the tourism sector, something that would be very difficult today with current working methods.

If sustainability tools are not developed and made available to SMEs, business associations and independent professionals in the short term, there is a definite risk that sustainability will be reduced to a purely cosmetic operation in many destinations, the kind of greenwashing mentioned previously, or that destinations achieve “green brand” status without addressing the deeper causes of the unsustainability of current development models.

17 – Territorial planning.

It is clear that the starting point must be territorial planning and strict land use laws to govern, in particular, those uses which directly or indirectly affect tourism. Emerging destinations and some consolidated Mediterranean zones still have the chance to develop their tourism at a balanced environmental, territorial and social cost, something that has not been the norm in recent decades, when there has been an enormous effect on the landscape as a result of human action and the excessive concentration of the offer.

18 – The special case of protected natural spaces.

The case of protected natural spaces deserves special attention with respect to sustainable tourist development in the Mediterranean.

The widespread declaration of protected natural spaces since the 1980s in some countries has not been accompanied, in general, by clear strategies for the valorisation and use of those spaces for tourist purposes. The passion for natural spaces that has been created on the demand side thanks to environmental education, awareness-raising and marketing has not been accompanied by appropriate visitor management policies to turn these spaces into a sustainable way of earning a living for the local population and to maintain the population of these territories.

19 – The framework for the planning of tourism.

Once territorial and environmental planning has been established, the framework of tourist planning is the fundamental tool that will enable us to achieve sustainable tourist development. This type of planning, in general, has been conspicuous by its absence in the Mediterranean area. The lack of any relationship between tourist planning and the marketing of destinations, for example, is what has caused the collapse of the development of inland and rural tourism in many places.

Obviously, a significant initial difficulty is that tourism is enormously transversal, which makes it difficult to plan, since responsibility for the industry is spread between many different administrative and institutional areas, sometimes with very little connection between each other and with contradictory interests.

In tourist planning, the concept of the capacity to receive incoming tourists and the load capacity of ecosystems are fundamental, as they are elements that will structure the development of models. Both of these concepts must be considered in depth.

20 – The case of “residential tourism” and its relationship with tourism.

The urban development that is collapsing territories is one of the main problems generated by excessive residential tourism or second homes. Residential tourism is highly sought after by local administrations since, initially, it is a significant generator of tax revenues for the municipality, very labour-intensive, a high consumer of materials and a user of auxiliary services. Later, however, once the residential population has settled, it generates a high demand for services and supplies which are not always compensated by the revenue.

21 – Dependence on tourism and models of development.

The appearance of tourism as a mass phenomenon has led to zones and countries which depend on a service economy and which, for decades, have not sought any other type of development based on technology or industry. This has created around the Mediterranean, and here we are specifically referring to the European experience, a kind of twin Europe: a Europe of outgoing tourism and a Europe of incoming tourism. Unfortunately, this model is being considered in the medium-term for the Mediterranean as a whole.

22 – The legal framework for the planning of sustainable tourism.

Following the logic of planning, for the framework of tourist planning to be effective, it must be accompanied by a clear legal framework governing the extent of development, both in the supply or physical basis and in tourist operations. There are many examples of how the load capacity of protected natural spaces can be overwhelmed by the pressure of the local tourist industry.

In such cases, the load capacity is not respected in order not to cause frustration in the numerous tourists who come, attracted by the emblematic protected space, even though they come for mass, standardised, short, high-consumption visits.

23 – Operational conditioning factors for sustainable tourism.

The planning framework lays down the operational conditioning factors or initial rules of play for the tourist industry. Evidently, we are talking about a very powerful industry which is the livelihood of millions of people around the Mediterranean. It is necessary, therefore, that the rules of play are clear and can be standardised and balanced between the different countries in order for tourism operations to progress determinedly towards sustainability, as is the case, for example, with the tourism directives of the European Union.

Here again, the role of the Chambers of Commerce as disseminators of knowledge is vital to the tourist business sector.

24 – The economic-entrepreneurial framework: the relationship between producers and destinations.

The economic/business framework is also fundamental in tourist planning, as it establishes the types of company and the conditions under which they can operate. It also allows limits to be established on the size, category, activities allowed, minimum quality standards, etc., for companies wishing to locate in a given area or territory.

25 - Associations.

The framework of the activity of associations is also very important for the promotion and dissemination of good sustainable tourism practices. The abundance of private interests and the diversity of associations with conflicting objectives, together with the enormous dispersion and localism of public tourism management do not exactly contribute to sustainable tourism management.

The strengthening of the framework for associations oriented towards sustainable tourism is an essential ally as a point of contact between the public and private sectors in the planning and implementation of sustainable tourism.

26 – Natural heritage resources.

We have already mentioned the specific case of protected natural spaces, but we must also cater for the humbler or less well-known natural spaces as sustainable tourist attractions, especially those rural areas which may lack services, which are further from large towns or cities or the main-line transport systems which are concentrated in coastal areas.

27 – Cultural heritage resources.

There is no doubt that the Mediterranean, as a cultural space, also represents a fundamental value of Europe and of the construction of the European cultural identity: Greece, Rome, Al-Andalus, the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians... all of these names conjure up ancient, consolidated cultures. They also have an immense power of attraction and exert an enormous influence on the great tourist pressure felt by Mediterranean destinations.

A special section in this paper should be dedicated to the identification, consolidation and conservation of the intangible heritage, given its greater fragility and the difficulty of making it a tourist product.

28 – Demand for tourism and its evolution.

It is not possible to consider sustainable tourism strategies in the Mediterranean without bearing in mind the demand and the trends in society. Changes in taste, needs and trends at all levels of society and in all aspects of human and productive life have an immediate repercussion on the behaviour of tourism and in the ways that territories and destinations are perceived.

In particular, in-depth knowledge of the motivations and the variables or functional factors of tourist demand will affect the promotion and communication of the destination, as regards the image of sustainability required by the more demanding consumer.

29 – Mobility and sustainable transport.

The option of more sustainable transport models and the avoidance of short journeys in a tourist industry with a voracious appetite for rapid sightseeing forms part of the tourist culture that, we believe, we should be seeking. In particular, short-distance tourism should be encouraged, with journeys made by rail and collective transport.

30 – The Mediterranean Sea as a resource and a destination.

Climate change is also a threat to the sustainability of the current model of tourism in the Mediterranean, since the industry concentrates a large number of flights and maritime transport voyages. Low-cost or fast-travel tourism is a good example of the phenomena which, from the tourism point of view, are hailed by some

destinations but which have generated an unsustainable model from all other points of view, including the economic aspects.

31 – Knowledge management and transfer.

It is clear that, faced with the widely-differing degrees of development of destinations, a system for the management and the transfer of knowledge is required, something which today does not exist in the Mediterranean area.

Of particular concern is the situation of SMEs in emerging destinations since, due to their small size, dispersion and lack of knowledge of outgoing markets, they have less chance of being able to develop sustainable, quality products which are at the same time competitive in the market.

32 – Tourism and biodiversity.

There is no doubt that properly-managed biodiversity is not only desirable, but also profitable. The abundance of valuable protected natural spaces, of birds, cetaceans and other natural attractions, are not generally matched by specialised tourist products related to such biodiversity.

33 – Institutional management of the sustainability of tourism.

Institutional management of the sustainability of tourism is a very complex issue and, first, we must address procedures for strengthening the institutions involved in tourist management of all types, including the Chambers of Commerce, convention bureaux and tourist offices.

This institutional strengthening, especially in the case of the more isolated, weak and emerging destinations, is essential for such management to become a reality and for sustainable tourism cooperation programmes to have valid interlocutors.